Habits and Behaviors of Unsuccessful Students

1. Students who are unsuccessful seldom answer any questions from the instructor or interact much in class at all.

2. They make it very clear to the instructor by word, deed, and body language that they are only in the class because they need the credit hours and have little in the subject. Often external issues such as their Veteran's Benefits, job obligations, organization activities, or personal issues all have more priority in their lives than the material or ideas presented in the course.

3. They read only that text in their used books that was already highlighted when they bought the book.

4. Unsuccessful students often shift blame. These students don't take personal responsibility for their academic failures, instead they make excuses and shift the blame for their shortcomings to others (such as professors, roommates, parents, ex-girlfriends). By not taking responsibility for their own mistakes, unsuccessful students rarely learn from them, and are not empowered to avoid them in the future (since in their own minds, they were not the reason for the problem to begin with).

5. Unsuccessful students often send text messages and/or emails during class, and otherwise use PTMITPs. (Portable Things More Interesting Than the Professor) These include iPhones, Blackberries, Sudoku puzzles, cell phones, and laptops, as well as many other devices and distractions. Instead of focusing on the lecture, taking notes, and participating in discussions, bottom students fritter their time away on inconsequential activities such as sending electronic messages to friends. Not only do such activities distract students from learning the course material that is being covered, but sends a powerful negative message to instructors about the commitment and discipline of the student.

6. Students who are unsuccessful too often revert to academic dishonesty, including copying homework assignments, doing cut/paste from internet sources on research papers, and using disallowed references during exams. These are just a few ways that
bottom college students engage in academic dishonesty to try to boost their grades. Not only do such activities rob students of learning opportunities and reward improper study habits, but they also reinforce students' feelings of academic inadequacy and carry the risk of being dismissed from the university.

7. Unsuccessful students often request special treatment at the end of the semester. Bottom students who have wasted the semester failing to submit homework assignments, putting forth sub-par efforts on exams, and not taking class projects seriously often ask instructors if there is 'anything they can do' to earn extra credit once they realize the extent of their low grades at the end of the semester. In nearly every case, the only way to earn grades in a course is through the means identified in the course syllabus, and if students do poorly on these opportunities there are no "second chances".

8. This is an obvious one and always included on a list of “what not to do”, but it’s so important it must be included here. Unsuccessful students usually complete assignments, papers, and projects at the last minute. Procrastination and delay are two of the unsuccessful students' constant companions. Bottom students do not take early action on assignments in order to ensure that they can complete them carefully and without the anxiety of a looming deadline. Instead, these students wait until the last moment to begin important projects and assignments, and as a result generally submit shoddy work that receives low grades when compared to the work of top students who carefully planned their work and completed it early so that it could be properly reviewed and edited before submission.

9. Unsuccessful students often do not know the instructor's name, and have never visited the instructor in his/her office.

10. Poor Attendance. This may be the most common student mistake-- and the most unavoidable. If you want to succeed in college, you need to be in class all or most of the time. There's no way around that. Simply because in instructor does not take roll or “count off” for missed class is not enough of a reason to sleep in.
11. Poor Time Management Skills. Many college students are overwhelmed with multiple academic and other responsibilities, so learning to manage time is essential.

12. Failure to Read Directions. If an instructor hands an outstanding student a detailed description of how to write an assignment, this student usually reads the description very carefully and follows the directions. Weak students too often take shortcuts and do not follow assigned guidelines. These students are often frustrated since they may have worked hard on the assignment, but received a low grade because of failure to follow instructions.

13. Over-reliance on other students. Asking to borrow a friend’s notes in case of a missed class session is a risk to be taken only when absolutely necessary. Though study groups can be an effective way to prepare for a test, successful students rely on these only as a part of their exam preparation, and don’t rely on the other students to do all the work. However, it is agreed among college professors that successful students usually affiliate with other successful students, and opposite is also true.

14. Over-reliance on the Internet. The Internet has made student research so much easier than it was a decade ago. Unfortunately, students can over-rely on the Internet and ignore other ways to do research. What's more, students are more likely to encounter inaccuracies on the Internet than in a book or article. When using the Internet, successful students always verify the information they find online by looking at other sources.

15. Unsuccessful students often treat college as a four-day activity. If they attend class on Friday it’s in body only – their real focus is on the weekend. And Friday through Sunday are fun-times. In truth, college is a full-time commitment, requiring 40-45 hours per week of class and out-of-class preparation. Sunday evening is a school night.